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**FOOD STAMP CERTIFICATION  
ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS  
Categorical Eligibility**

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**FS 620 Categorical Eligibility**

**Change #3-2004**

**August 1, 2004**

**620.01 CATEGORICAL ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENT**

A. Categorical eligibility for the Food Stamp Program refers to food stamp households containing at least one individual certified to receive Work First Family Assistance (WFFA) cash benefits or authorized to receive Work First Employment Services. In most situations, categorical eligibility refers to food stamp households, not individuals. A categorically eligible food stamp household is exempt from meeting the resource limit or the gross or net income limits. The only time that categorical eligibility applies to an individual instead of the entire food stamp household is for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients.

B. Food stamp households are categorically eligible when:

1. At least one member of the food stamp unit (FSU) is authorized to receive Work First Cash Assistance. This includes payment types 1, 2, and Benefit Diversion.
2. At least one member of the FSU is authorized to receive an available service from Work First Employment Services. This includes FSU's that are at or below 200% of the federal poverty level and at least one member of the FSU is authorized to receive Work First Services available through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant. The individual may receive services available for working low-income families or for non-custodial parents.

"Authorized to receive" means that an individual has been determined eligible for benefits and has been notified of this determination, even if the benefits have been authorized but not received, authorized but not accessed, suspended, or recouped.

Develop verification procedures within the agency to determine individuals that are authorized for Work First Employment Services. Some options include use of the Services Information System (SIS), DSS-8194's, Work First Services Worksheet, contacting the Work First Employment Services Section in your agency, or any other method that will ensure that these households are deemed categorically eligible. Document the case file that the individual is authorized for Work First Employment Services.

**NOTE:** This policy applies only to counties that provide these services within their agency and have submitted a Work First Plan indicating they are providing these services. Welfare-to-Work and other contracted employment services are not considered Work First Employment Services for categorical eligibility determination.

3. All members of the FSU are authorized to receive SSI benefits.

**NOTE:** SSI recipients are categorically eligible on an individual basis. Categorical eligibility cannot be given to the entire FSU unless the other individuals in the FSU meet some other criteria for being categorically eligible.

C. A household is not eligible for categorical eligibility for food stamp benefits if any member of the household is disqualified for :

1. An intentional program violation (IPV);

<p><b>Section 620 Change #5-2001 June 1, 2001</b></p>
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2. Failure to comply with work program requirements as required in Section 240, Work Requirements; **or**
  3. Conviction of a drug felony since August 23, 1996, for an act committed on or after August 23, 1996.
- D. Categorically eligible FSU's are subject to all food stamp eligibility requirements with the exception of resources. Food Stamp Citizenship/Alien status and other eligibility requirements must be met prior to evaluating for categorical eligibility. Categorically eligible FSU's are also subject to all benefit provisions.

**620.02 VERIFICATION**

- A. Verify the type of assistance received and the authorization period. Document in the case record that an individual is authorized for:
1. Work First Family Assistance (payment type 1);
  2. Work First Family Assistance (payment type 2);
  3. Benefit Diversion;
  4. Work First Employment Services for Working Low-Income Families;
  5. Work First Employment Services for Non-Custodial Parents; **or**
  6. SSI Benefits
- B. Categorically eligible households have met certain eligibility requirements through the certification process that has been used for Work First Cash Assistance, SSI, and Work First Employment Services. Do not require additional verification of the following eligibility factors, unless questionable.
1. Resources – The household automatically passes the resource test. Do not require any additional verification.  
  
**NOTE:** Resources of SSI recipients are excluded, and resources of FSU's containing at least one Work First Cash Assistance or Work First Employment Services for working low-income families or non-custodial parents recipient are excluded.
  2. Gross and Net Income – The FSU is exempt from the gross and net income limits test.
  3. Enumeration
  4. Residency – No further verification is required. The household must reside in the county in which it applies for food stamp benefits.
- C. Verify eligibility factors required for determination of benefit level that are not verified by WFFA, Work First Employment Services, or SSI as listed:
1. Income disregarded for WFFA or SSI but not disregarded for food stamp benefits.
  2. Household composition, if questionable.

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- D. Refer to Section 225, Citizenship and Alien Status, to determine food stamp eligibility for aliens. An individual can be eligible for SSI, WFFA, or Work First Employment Services but ineligible for food stamp benefits due to his/her alien status. Aliens are not automatically categorically eligible.

**620.03 APPLICATION PROCESSING FOR HOUSEHOLDS APPLYING FOR BOTH FOOD STAMP BENEFITS AND WFFA/SSI/WORK FIRST EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

- A. Approving a Food Stamp Application Pending Work First Cash Assistance, SSI, or Work First Employment Services Approval
1. Follow regular food stamp policy verification procedures for eligibility factors that are needed solely for determining food stamp eligibility.
  2. If the FSU has provided sufficient verification to meet food stamp verification requirements but has failed to provide sufficient verification for WFFA, SSI, or Work First Employment Services approval, process the food stamp application following regular Food Stamp Program rules. Do not deny the FSU's food stamp application for failure to provide sufficient verification or for failure to comply with processing requirements.
  3. If a FSU's categorical eligibility cannot be established due to a pending WFFA, SSI, or Work First Employment Services application, pend the food stamp application until the 30th day unless the FSU is entitled to expedited service. This only applies when categorical eligibility is needed to establish food stamp eligibility.
  4. Once WFFA, SSI, or Work First Employment Services is approved, the FSU is considered categorically eligible if all other eligibility criteria are met.
  5. If the WFFA or SSI approval can be reasonably anticipated, include the monthly payment amount as income. "Reasonably anticipated" means that the WFFA application-processing deadline is approaching and no processing delays are expected or an SSI award letter has been issued.
  6. Do not include WFFA or SSI payments intended for prior months as income.
  7. If the amount and/or date of receipt of the initial WFFA or SSI benefits cannot be reasonably anticipated, do not count the payment as income. Consider the WFFA or SSI approval as a change in situation.
  8. For pending Work First Employment Services applications, the FSU is not categorically eligible until at least one member of the FSU is authorized for Work First Employment Services. If authorization can be reasonably anticipated, consider the FSU categorically eligible. If authorization cannot be reasonably anticipated, follow regular food stamp eligibility rules.
- B. Denying a Food Stamp Application Pending WFFA, Work First Employment Services, or SSI Approval

Do not deny the application of a potentially categorically eligible household until the 30<sup>th</sup> calendar day following the date of application if pending for an eligibility factor that is related to categorical eligibility.

If a household is ineligible based on food stamp eligibility criteria and the WFFA, Work First Employment Services, or SSI eligibility decision is still pending on the 30<sup>th</sup> day, take the following actions.

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1. Deny the food stamp application on the 30<sup>th</sup> day using regular food stamp rules.
2. Ensure that the denied application of a potentially categorically eligible household is easily retrievable. A manual tracking system, or any method that will provide accessibility as needed, may accomplish this task. Continue to monitor the pending SSI, WFFA, or Work First Employment Services application until a determination is made regarding eligibility. This can be accomplished by monitoring SSI applications for a period of 90 days (the period of time that the Social Security Administration has to approve or deny SSI benefits) and by monitoring WFFA or Work First Employment Services applications for 45 days (the period of time allowed to approve or deny a WFFA application). If the SSI, WFFA, or Work First Employment Services application pends longer than the allowable time frames, inform the household of their responsibility to provide notification of the approval or denial.

**C. Reopening a Previously Denied Food Stamp Application Upon WFFA, Work First Employment Services, or SSI Approval**

If the household becomes categorically eligible after the food stamp application is denied, reevaluate the original application upon request or when you become aware of the household's SSI, WFFA, or Work First Employment Services approval. Take the following actions:

1. Reopen the application. The date of application is either the original date of application or the effective date of the WFFA, Work First Employment Services, or SSI approval, whichever is later.
2. Do not reinterview the household. Update the original application using available information. Contact the household via telephone or mail to explore changes in situation.
3. If information obtained from the household differs from original information or changes have occurred, a household member or authorized representative must initial all changes, resign and date the updated application, and provide necessary verification.
4. Allow deductions for specified persons beginning with the date of the food stamp application or the effective date of the SSI payment, whichever is later.
5. Authorize food stamp benefits back to the date of the food stamp application for FSU's that are determined eligible for WFFA, SSI, or Work First Employment Services for a period of time within the 30-day food stamp processing time.
6. If a FSU files a joint application and is determined categorically eligible after being denied food stamp benefits under regular program rules, prorate food stamp benefits from the date of the food stamp application or the date the public assistance (PA) benefits are authorized, whichever is later.

**D. Allotments for Categorically Eligible Households**

1. All categorically eligible one or two-person FSU's are entitled to at least a \$10 allotment.
2. There is no minimum allotment for categorically eligible households with three or more members. Food stamp budgeting procedures may determine these households ineligible for an allotment based on a zero allotment amount as determined by the FSU's income level.

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3. If the household is ineligible for an allotment, the DSS-8590, Client Record, displays the following message: "Case suspended – Categorical eligibility – allotment less than \$1.00." **Verify entries but do not close the case.**

**620.04      SUSPENDED CATEGORICALLY ELIGIBLE HOUSEHOLDS**

- A. If a categorically eligible household is ineligible for an allotment and the case is suspended, take the following action:
  1. Notify the household that food stamp benefits are suspended and of the rights and responsibilities during suspension. Provide notification via DSS-8636, Notice of Suspension. Specify the reason for suspension on the notice.
  2. Monitor suspended cases until the end of the certification period. Close the case at the end of the certification period unless the household becomes eligible during the certification period or applies for recertification.
  3. Do not send the NCSES-2624, Food Stamp Registration/Deregistration Form, to ESC until the household becomes eligible for benefits.
- B. When a suspended categorically eligible household has a change in circumstances and becomes eligible for an allotment, authorize benefits effective the date the change is reported or becomes known to the agency.
  1. Document the change in situation that makes the household eligible for an allotment in the case file.
  2. Process the change within ten calendar days of the date the change is reported or otherwise becomes known to the agency.
  3. Prorate benefits for the first month the household becomes eligible for an allotment. Prorate from the date the change becomes known to the agency. Enter the change date in field 8 of the DSS-8590 and the month of the change in field 14 to authorize benefits.
  4. Use the DSS-8562, Effect of Change, to notify the household of the allotment amount.
  5. Issue benefits via the DSS-8593.
- C. Terminate a suspended categorically eligible household at the end of the certification period unless:
  1. The household reports a change that makes it eligible for an allotment, **or**
  2. The agency becomes aware of a change that makes the household eligible for an allotment, **or**
  3. The household applies for recertification.

**620.05      LOSS OF CATEGORICAL ELIGIBILITY**

- A. A household is no longer categorically eligible if WFFA, Work First Employment Services, and/or SSI benefits terminate. Loss of categorical eligibility is not a required reportable change. Use the following guidelines to determine when categorical eligibility ends:

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1. WFFA (payment type 1) terminates; **evaluate for Transitional Food Stamps.**
  2. WFFA (payment type 2) terminates; **evaluate for Transitional Food Stamps.**
  3. Benefit diversion cases are certified for up to three months. The FSU remains categorically eligible during the Benefit Diversion certification period only;
  4. Authorization for Work First Employment Services for working low-income families ends.; **or**
  5. Authorization for Work First Employment Services for a non-custodial parent ends.
- B. When there is sufficient information to determine how a change affects the FSU's eligibility and benefit level, notify the FSU when benefits are adjusted as a result of the change in PA benefits.
- C. Do not terminate the FSU's food stamp benefits when a change results in the termination of a household's PA benefits within its food stamp certification period and there is insufficient information to determine how the change affects the FSU's food stamp eligibility and benefit level. Send the FSU a notice of expiration which informs the FSU that its certification period will expire at the end of the month following the month the notice of expiration is sent and that it must reapply if it wishes to continue to participate. The notice of expiration must include an explanation that the FSU's certification period is expiring because of changes in circumstances which may affect food stamp eligibility and the benefit level.
- D. If WFFA, SSI, or Work First Employment Services benefits are terminated but the household is still eligible for food stamp benefits, advise the FSU of the appropriate work requirements.